

The Great GOP Bait and Switch

Oped by Senate Democratic Leader Nan Rich

Call it the great Republican bait and switch of the 2011 Legislative Session. What was supposed to be a call to action for lawmakers in response to the voters following the November elections, namely: “Jobs! Jobs! Jobs!” quickly morphed into indifference - at least as far as Florida’s battered economy was concerned.

But in almost every other crevice of our daily lives - from education to health care to controlling our own bodies to guns to religion - the Republicans outdid themselves.

In one masterful 60-day swoop, they managed to use more than one million unemployed Floridians as cover to ram through a hard right wing agenda the ultra conservative and billionaire Koch Brothers have spent fortunes and decades to accomplish.

They protected loopholes for tax-dodging corporations but cut funding for public school children by \$1.35 billion, a whopping \$542 per child; they slashed money for hospitals by \$510 million but did everything in their power to block Floridians’ access to universal healthcare; they forced women to pay for ultrasounds but muzzled doctors from protecting children; they lowered flags to half staff for the fallen while simultaneously slapping a special 3% tax on police officers and every other public servant; and they told us we need to be responsible enough to change our addresses before we exercise our right to vote, but citizen groups like the League of Women Voters can’t be trusted to register new voters without draconian government oversight.

Governor Rick Scott, Senate President Mike Haridopolos, and House Speaker Dean Cannon deregulated, de-funded and dismantled in the name of “economic growth,” ominously imposing their corporate masters as our own. They did this despite Florida’s 2009 ranking as 5th best in the nation for its low business tax rate and number of “anti-business regulations” from none other than Arthur Laffer himself, the guru of the discredited trickle down economic theory the Republicans have blindly followed for the past 13 years they’ve ruled Tallahassee.

As the 2012 election season begins, Floridians would do well to remember this session. The free-for-all playground they’ve created for Wall Street stands in stark contrast to the restrictions they’ve slapped on everyone else. And while this hard right turn might appeal to tea partying supporters, it’s just another hammer coming down on a middle class that’s overtaxed, overwhelmed and still looking for those promised jobs.

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